

Verne
Thank
you

TRIP REPORT
UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 6

DATE: 2/11/91

SUBJECT: Arkwood Incineration Workshop, 2/7/91.

FROM: Verne McFarland
Superfund Community Relations

TO: Betty Williamson, Chief
Superfund Management Branch

DATE(S) OF TRAVEL: February 7 - 8, 1991

NAME OF TRAVELER: Verne McFarland

PURPOSE OF TRIP: To conduct an informational citizens' workshop on hazardous waste incineration to support the EPA preferred remedy for the Arkwood site, and in response to requests from citizens for such a workshop.

PERSONS CONTACTED: Mayor Jake Arnold, School Supt. Dr. David Land, Bob Grafton (Sierra Club), others on attached list.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY: A total of 25 citizens attended this workshop (19 signed in), including reporters from the Harrison Daily Times and Channel 33/ABC from Springfield, Missouri. Their questions did not seem to show any particular pre-disposition or bias. Two representatives from Mass Merchandisers, Inc. (MMI) were also present, and they videotaped the meeting (they agreed to supply us with a copy of the tape). Bob Barker of MMI had evidently attended the most recent city council meeting, where he circulated a copy of the Greenpeace paper on incineration. While not confirmed, it appears that MMI has teamed up with the National Toxics Campaign/Sierra Club/Greenpeace in an attempt to subvert the preferred remedy and EPA CR efforts. The PRP is attempting to take advantage of the relatively low educational level of the citizenry, and is continuing to conduct a misinformation campaign and foment community distrust of "government actions."

The videotape presentations were well received, but still seemed almost too technical for the audience. Many of the issues that were thoroughly addressed in the tapes were brought up again during the question/answer portion of the workshop. A dichotomy seems to exist between the community's adversity to incineration of the Arkwood wastes due to concerns about stack emissions, and the general feeling (especially by individuals that worked at the facility in the past) that the waste products are not particularly harmful ("I used to get the stuff all over my hands and clothes, and I haven't gotten sick!").

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Overall, of the citizens that attended the workshop, about 50% were supportive of the EPA position, and 50% against. Most of the citizens that were supportive did not offer comments or questions, but seem to be at the workshop to learn what they could and hear comments/questions from those against incineration. The most vocal opposition came from the Sierra Club representative, who was supported in his comments by the PRP representatives with questions that attempted to reinforce the suggestion of excavation/transportation to "anyplace else but Omaha." The School Superintendent expressed his concerns regarding information published recently in the Arkansas Democrat about ENSCO and Vertac incinerator emissions, and how a "scientist" (i.e. Greenpeace Toxic Campaign Research Director and incineration "expert," Pat Costner) has determined that sampling shortcomings and dioxin/furan "recombination" after incineration create a hazard to the school and the community. The issue of the incinerator becoming a permanent facility is a pervasive one, and every attempt was made to reiterate that EPA had no plans to effect this at the site.

EPA staff were well prepared and did very good job of describing incineration technology in the most simple terms possible. Stan Burger was a valuable member of the team due to his extensive knowledge of incineration, permitting and the ENSCO issue. All issues and questions posed were addressed in a professional and effective manner. One vocal resident even expressed his gratitude for EPA involvement and presence after a lengthy tirade opposing incineration (dare I say informed consent?).

Follow up letters are planned for the participants in the workshop and in the community interviews conducted by Tony Gardner of PRC during November and December 1990. The letters will emphasize the importance of community involvement and the need to maintain a balanced, objective perspective regarding the incineration issue. Based on area events to date, MMI is conducting a concerted campaign to spread misinformation about incineration and EPA, and prey on (and create additional) fears and emotions of the non-sophisticated populace of Omaha. To counter this campaign, a full-time EPA employee (contractor or AARP) would be required in the community to match MMI issue-for-issue and "blow-for-blow," especially in light of the revelation from Enforcement that MMI's parent company in San Francisco is orchestrating the current public relations efforts. Printed material is not well received or understood, even when written at the 6-8th grade level. One-on-one contact and informal forums such as this workshop appear to be the most effective in gaining the trust of the community and countering MMI's PR program. However, based on current projections of reduced travel budgets, written communication will most likely be the default means of contact with the community. Another alternative that should be considered is a telephone link-up with a local radio talk show. A team could be assembled at the regional office and through a conference call or speaker-phone, participate in the talk show without having to physically travel to the radio studio.

Good idea